Lafayette Historical Society
POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

NEWSLETTER

President: Bill Somerton (284-9785)

Lafayette, California April, 1997 Vol. 24, No. 2

LHS Annual "Pot Luck" Dinner

Date:	Tuesday, May 13, 1997	
Time:	6 PM	Social Hour
	7 PM	Dinner
	8 PM	Short business session followed by—
Speaker:	Bill Cahill	***The Wild and Woolly California Gold Rush***
Location:	Lafayette Veterans Memorial Hall, Mt. Diablo Blvd. at 1st Street, Lafayette	
Price:	$5.00 (to help defray LHS expenses), plus your favorite salad or casserole	
Questions?	Call Dick Johnson (283-0199), Keith Blakeney (284-2221), or Ollie Hamlin (283-6822)	

The Program

As always, we look forward to getting together with all our historical friends to celebrate the past, relish future plans and enjoy a hearty meal and entertaining evening together. Be sure to reserve the date and put it on your calendar right now. Each family should bring its favorite casserole or salad, large enough to serve 6 to 8 people. Board members will provide dessert and LHS will pro-

Elmer Bliss at Mining Claim, c. 1852. Half plate daguerreotype, The Zelda Mackay Collection, The Bancroft Library, Berkeley. Photo courtesy of The Oakland Museum of California.

vide wine and coffee. The no-host bar will be open for business promptly at 6 PM.

The Speaker

Our speaker for the evening is Bill Cahill, a Rossmoor resident who has been a docent with the Oakland Museum of California for seven years. Mr. Cahill, who has long been a student of the Gold Rush, is Chair of the docent group which conducts Gold Rush tours at the Museum. He has given many talks and museum tours on the subject. Groups in our area who have enjoyed his presentations include the Rossmoor Kiwanis Club and the High 12 Club.

The Oakland Museum will soon be kicking off its Sesquicentennial Celebration of the California Gold Rush. It is developing programs and exhibits for this celebration, which will last two years. (Note: Lafayette will be celebrating its own Sesquicentennial in 1998.)

The Topic—The California Gold Rush

We will hear the true story about John Marshall, John Sutter and Sam Brannan, the hapless men who played such a significant role in this phenomenal event which led to the explosive development of California. Bill will tell us how they hit it big and how they wound up, about many other successes and failures and what life was really like during this epoch in our history. We recently previewed Mr. Cahill's presentation and can assure you, we all will find this program highly informative and humorous.

- by Keith Blakeney, Program Chair

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President's Message

We have had a very active year with many accomplishments. My thanks to the committeee chairs and other volunteers for their splendid work.

At the upcoming annual meeting and Potluck, there will be a new membership directory and an annual reports booklet. The booklet will give details of the accomplishments of each committee.

We are not exempt from the normal case in a volunteer organization: there are more things to do than volunteers to do them. Letters have been sent to all members who indicated on their annual dues form their willingness to be of help. Each letter included the name and phone number of the committee chair for the area of interest of the member. In addition, the chair of the appropriate committee has been requested to contact each member who responded. Life members, and renewing members who did not respond may still do so.

We are particularly grateful to the City of Lafayette for providing funds to help us expand our activities. We are making our best effort to justify this added support.

We all look forward to seeing you at the annual Potluck and Meeting.

- by Bill Somerton, President

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Campaign '97

Here it comes again, the annual LHS Election! Each year we elect one-third of the Board of Directors to serve for 3 year terms. Since there are 12 members of the Board, this means 4 members are elected each year. The election is held at the annual meeting (aka Pot Luck). It's a never-ending task, this electing, but somebody has to do it!

Your Nominating Committee has secured pledges of continuing service for the next 3 years from the following Directors:

Marechal Duncan
Bill Somerton
Paul Sheehan
Bill Wakeman

When a Director leaves the Board, the Membership elects someone to complete that Director's term. Since Elizabeth Johnston has resigned, the Nominating Committee recommends as a replacement for the 1 year remaining term:

Tom Titmus (Tom is an attorney in Lafayette)

Members of the Nominating Committee are Ruth Dyer, Ollie Hamlin and Bill Wakeman.

June Tour -The John Muir Home (rescheduled)

Date:	June 14, 1997
Time:	9:00 AM — Carpools depart
Location:	Lafayette Community Center Parking Lot 500 St. Marys Road
Price:	$12.50

Originally planned for March, this tour has been "restructured to correct a low response problem". The program committee did some soul searching and decided the tour was really worthwhile but some changes were undoubtedly in order. Therefore:

- We changed lunch from a restaurant to box lunches (to be provided by Haute Stuff in Martinez; highly recommended), substantially cutting the cost of the tour.
- We scheduled the tour in June which should be good outdoor weather. This is important because we will be picnicking on the "Park" property.
- We changed from a weekday to a weekend to accommodate those of us who still go to work.
- We have engaged a name speaker for a bigger draw. By special arrangement, our speaker will be John Muir, himself. What more could one ask?
- We are extending our invitation to Orinda and Moraga Historical Societies as we must have a minimum of 20 adventurers.

John Muir House, Martinez. Photo courtesy of John Muir National Historic Site.

The program will include a film presentation followed by a guided tour of the historic, five story, John Muir Mansion and Adobe House. Also on the schedule is a picnic lunch and our special speaker, John Muir. The speaker's topic will be himself, of course, and a glimpse of life in Contra Costa County in the late 19th century.

The tour, open to anyone interested, will depart by carpool caravan from the Lafayette Community Center, 500 St. Marys Road, at 9:00 a.m., sharp, Saturday, June 14th, and return about 2:00 p.m. Reservations must be made in advance and rides can be arranged for anyone wanting a lift. Cost of the tour is $12.50 per person for LHS members and $15.00 per person for all others. Price includes the film, the tour, the lunch and the speaker.

For reservations and further information please call Keith Blakeney, Program Chairman, at 510/284-2221, or mail your check, payable to Lafayette Historical Society, to Keith Blakeney, P.O. Box 1336, Lafayette, CA 94549. Be sure to include your phone number so we can confirm your reservation.

- by Keith Blakeney, Program Chair

COMPUTER TAKEOVER?

[Editor's Note: Member Bob Heaton spent many evenings at the Stanley School Computer Lab, laboring on behalf of LHS Online. Herewith some of his impressions.]

We approached
the computer lab
some with trepidation
others very confident
How would
they behave
this hot
and steamy day?
As I hit
the start button
(I'm confident
about that!)
The experts
gathered around
to get me to
the RIGHT menu.
I sat
at attention
as they
hovered about
"What's the
big deal,
haven't we
done this before?"
Finally I
can get
to work
on our data base
Things start
humming
as passwords
abound
OUCH
what happened
to last Thursday's
file?
Consensus says
"an expert"
signed off,
blew it away
We humans
recovered
and continued
"our files"
after a time
confidence rose
I whistled and
cracked a joke
The temperature
built up
as the keys
clicked away
Then of a sudden
the mouse went dumb
we glared at the arrow
as we willed it to move
no go
no show
what to do
lose it all?
We begged it
cajoled it
called up
a friend
could we ever
put the record
back up
once again
finally relenting
computer opened
a window to
let us retreat
with dignity
we decided
try again
another day
HUMANS WILL PREVAIL

- by Bob Heaton, LHS Online

Oral History on Compact Disks!

Over the years the Society has had the foresight to record oral histories, interviewing prominent citizens about their own recollections or about family members who were the original settlers in the area.

These interviews were recorded on audio tapes. We currently have in our archives eight 7½" inch reels of ¼" tape, two 3" reels of ¼" tape, and 52 cassettes.

As these tapes have a limited life, and some of them are more than 20 years old, the Board decided to investigate what could be done to preserve the information on them. We found a firm that could transfer the contents of the tapes to CD disks, which are considered to have an indefinite life. The process includes baking the tapes to prevent separation of the magnetic coating from the plastic tape, which can occur with tapes as old as the ones we have. All the interviews from the ten ¼" reels have now been transferred to CD disks. The disks are indexed so that any interview can be found easily.

We are now looking for a way to circulate these disks so their contents can be more widely used.

-by Jop Van Overveen

* * *

"Old Betsy" Update

This report is much like other recent reports about the 1919 Model T Ford fire engine: some progress but no completion. Just the other day I took the fenders to a truck body repair shop in Oakland. Those who are old enough to remember the thickness of the steel that was used in older cars will understand that many of the modern body shops do not work on these heavier metals. To some extent it is that they don't have the equipment to form and shape the heavier steel, but in some cases it's that they don't know how to do the work. Most restored older cars (earlier than World War II) are now done as a hobby by hand and by the owners. Well, the fenders are now in the hands of a body shop that knows what to do; they are promised for delivery to me before the end of April.

The body shop will straighten and repair the fenders, and paint them with an undercoat. Then I will take them to the paint shop that has repainted the engine hood and radiator cover. When all parts are painted they should look shiny and new again. When I have the fenders back, we can reassemble the front end of the fire engine body. We also have oak lumber for the running boards, which will be finished to look nice with the newly painted metal parts.

There are still plenty of things to do just to make the fire engine look attractive. For example, the head lamps need to be stripped and repainted black, a new battery box is needed and the seat needs to be rebuilt. Those are things that someone handy with wood or just with plenty of time to remove old paint and clean a surface can do. All comers are welcome to take part in this project. Please call me at 283-4420 to find out how you can help.

This job has been an ongoing project, but is still not finished. I hope to have some finished parts, if not the whole fire engine at the Pot Luck. Come by and see what has been done.

We appreciate the contributions of the members, and promise a finished job soon.

-by George Wasson, Keeper of
the Fire Engine

* * *

Lafayette Horse Show Display

Bill Somerton has constructed a new historical display, and installed it in the display case on the west side of the Lafayette Lucky store. This is the latest in a series of displays prepared by the Society, celebrating the history of major events in Lafayette.

This new display illustrates the Lafayette Horse Show, an annual event from 1935 to 1942. Ollie Hamlin, whose father and grandfather were major organizers of the show, has written the following history:

> A major community event—the Lafayette Horse Show—was held from 1935 to 1942, when it was interrupted by World War II. It was a major event, not only for Lafayette, but for all the horsemen of Contra Costa County. Two days of competition and events were held in late July or early August, usually the hottest time of the year.
>
> The arena was located just to the south of St. Marys Road, on property then owned by Dr. O. D. Hamlin, a long-time Lafayette resident. The site extended

south to what is now Hamlin Road, and from the present Solana Drive on the east to the Creek on the west.

The show opened with a large parade down Mt. Diablo Blvd. This was followed by a ceremonial grand entrance with a long line of horses with riders carrying flags coming over the hill to the east and down to the horse show grounds. All the best horses in the county were represented, and there was a distinguished panel of judges and impressive prizes for the winners. The last show was in 1942. After the war the property on which the show was held was subdivided, and is now known as Lafayette Homeland.

When a new display is put in the Lucky Store case, the previous display is moved to the Community Room of the California Federal Bank (formerly First Nationwide) on Mt. Diablo Blvd. Suggestions for future displays are solicited.

-by Bill Somerton

Board of Directors Actions

March, 1997 meeting—

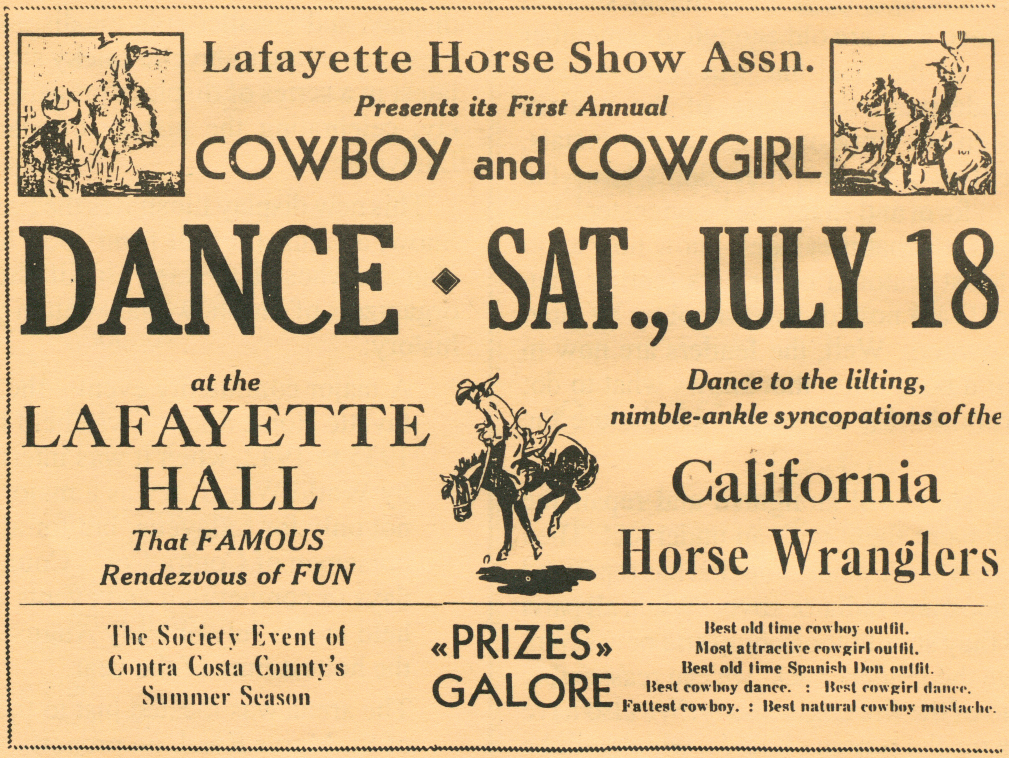
The County Library has approved the lawn of the Lafayette Library as the site for a Pony Express marker.

A Lafayette Sesquicentennial Committee is being formed to plan a 1998 celebration of Lafayette's founding, with LHS playing a leadership role. Members are invited to take part in the planning. Contact Marechal Duncan or Keith Blakeney.

The Society has obtained some acid-free folders to hold the photos in the archives. Members are needed to assist in transferring photos to the new folders. Contact Angela Broadhead at 944-5843.

Joe Nardone has given the Society a piece of wire from the first transcontinental telegraph. It has been analyzed and found to have been made in England of high-strength steel. Opportunities for its display are being considered.

The Society has been given two books from Jennie Bickerstaff's library by a Bay Point man. They are estimated to be about 100 years old.



Lafayette Horse Show Assn.

Presents its First Annual

COWBOY and COWGIRL

DANCE ◆ SAT., JULY 18

at the

LAFAYETTE HALL

That FAMOUS Rendezvous of FUN

Dance to the lilting, nimble-ankle syncopations of the

California Horse Wranglers

The Society Event of Contra Costa County's Summer Season

«PRIZES» GALORE

Best old time cowboy outfit.
Most attractive cowgirl outfit.
Best old time Spanish Don outfit.
Best cowboy dance. : Best cowgirl dance.
Fattest cowboy. : Best natural cowboy mustache.

This poster, from the Lafayette Historical Society's Archives, promotes a Lafayette Horse Show during the 1930's. Katherine Schutt won the prize for the most attractive cowgirl outfit.

1996/97 Board of Directors and Committee Chairs

Board of Directors

Bill Somerton, President	284-9785
Nancy Flood, Vice President	283-3409
Paul Sheehan, Treasurer	284-1287
Ruth Dyer, Recording Secretary	283-8312
Oliver Hamlin, Corresponding Secretary	283-6822
Keith Blakeney	284-2221
Marechal Duncan	283-6812
Elizabeth Johnston	284-4286
Ray Peters	283-5256
Joseph VanOverveen	283-3650
Bill Wakeman	283-3908
Gary Willcuts	283-0706

Committee Chairs

Annual Potluck Dinner, Richard Johnson	283-0199
Archives & Historical Displays, Bill Somerton	284-9785
Book Sales, Ruth Dyer	283-8312
Fire Engine, George Wasson	284-4603
Historian, Bill Wakeman	283-3908
LHS Online, Gary Willcuts	283-0706
Membership, Oliver Hamlin	284-1446
Newsletter Editor, Gary Willcuts	283-0706
Newsletter Mailing, Ruby & James Sturman	283-1250
Oral Historian, Nancy Flood	283-3409
Plaza Park, Ray Peters	283-5256
Programs, Keith Blakeney	284-2221
Walking Tours, Bill Wakeman	283-3908

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Lafayette Historical Society

MEMBER INFORMATION

(For multiple names/addresses, please photocopy this form.)

Name: ______________________________ Spouse: __________________

Address: ______________________________ City/State/Zip __________________

Home Phone: __________________ Daytime phone: __________________

Membership Categories and annual dues (please check one):

______	Student membership	$ 2.50
______	Family membership	$ 10.00
______	Business membership	$ 50.00
______	Life membership	$100.00

Make check payable to **Lafayette Historical Society** and mail to P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

DUES	$________
Contribution to fire engine maintenance	$________
TOTAL ENCLOSED	$________

Please indicate your areas of special interest:

_____ Annual Dinner Committee
_____ Displays
_____ Newpaper Clippings
_____ Programs & Trips
_____ Walking Tours
_____ Archives
_____ Fire Engine
_____ Oral History
_____ Research
_____ Other ______________________________
_____ Computers
_____ Landmarks
_____ Photograph Collection
_____ Telephone Committee

LHS Calendar

May—Annual Pot Luck Dinner

Date/Time	Tuesday, May 13, 1997, 6PM Social Hour

June—Tour of John Muir Home

Tour will include luncheon in Martinez

Date/Time	Saturday, June 14, 1997, 9 AM
Cost	$12.50
To sign up	Call Keith Blakeney, 284-2221

Board of Directors Meeting—Open to all members

Date/Time	To be announced
Place	To be announced

Deadline for LHS Newsletter Articles

Articles to Gary Willcuts by Monday, September 8, 1997

Anyone interested in obtaining information about activities of, or membership in, the Lafayette Historical Society is invited to contact Oliver Hamlin, 283-6822.

Lafayette Historical Society
POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

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